

# Sioux City prepares to 'wow' judges with Great Places plan

Those of us who live and work in Sioux City know this is a great place. Now it's time to demonstrate that we've got the stuff to be a Great Place.

The city gets that chance on Wednesday at the Orpheum Theatre when for one hour, community representatives will make the case before three judges that Sioux City should be one of three projects chosen for the first Iowa's Great Places program. More than 70 proposals will be made to panels of judges across the state this month and decisions are expected next month.

During an editorial board session with The Journal, Siouxland Chamber of Commerce President Debi Durham, Briar Cliff University President Bev Wharton and Kyle Kelly, president of the Sioux City Growth Organization, laid out the details of the community's proposal. Staff writer Bret Hayworth shared them with our readers in a copyright story on Thursday.

With a theme of "We make the connection," the plan is, as Durham put it, "all about downtown." It ties together as its key elements the riverfront, the former stockyards, the local foods market at the corner of Fifth Street and Floyd Boulevard and the core Fourth Street artery. It continues a transformation of downtown that already is under way and builds on improvements already realized.

The plan is visionary, impressive in scope, and exciting to the imagination. It provides the kind of "wow factor" that the judges will be looking for, Durham said.

What do you think about open access to the riverfront from downtown, complete with a signature terra cotta bridge? How about transformation of the old concrete Floyd River channel in the stockyards into an area of trails, pedestrian bridges, landscaping and historic dis-

plays? Or a \$1 million design and renovation of the local foods market into a place of cooking and other food-related classes, multi-cultural exchanges, improved marketing space for vendors and a restaurant? How about the rehabilitation of the Badgerow Building? Or a Sioux City School of Architecture? They all are envisioned in the plan.

Components of the plan also include work already in the planning and discussion stages, such as putting the Public Museum into the former Penney building, tearing down the KD Station, continuing to open Fourth Street, connecting walking and biking trails, reconstructing Interstate 29, and building a new parking ramp. There are long-term and short-term elements. There are expensive and not-so-expensive pieces. Created by a diverse cross-section of people, organizations and interests, the plan incorporates the city's history and unique architecture, improves aesthetics, addresses quality of life, seeks to leverage public and private funds and highlights a past record of success.

Some will view the city's plan as too pie-in-the-skyish. Some \$75 million of projects, paid for with a proposed combination of public and private funds, are envisioned between 2006 and 2012. Add in plans to reconstruct Interstate 29 and that total rises considerably.

However, as Durham pointed out, Sioux City already has realized some \$370 million worth of public/private projects in roughly the last decade. Based on that track record, she said, another \$75 million over the next seven years is "completely doable." She said recent accomplishments will be in Sioux City's favor when it makes its pitch to the judges because that will show the state that this community is a doer, that it will be a viable partner in this

endeavor.

Certainly, this plan is not cast in stone. Much work and money and many decisions would be necessary to bring this plan to fruition. For now, it is a blueprint, if you will, for what downtown Sioux City could look like in the future. On its face, it may seem to some too daunting, difficult and costly, but consider that great stuff doesn't happen on its own.

To grow and enjoy success, communities must think big and be ambitious, proactive, creative and imaginative. Instead of negatively allowing potential obstacles to overwhelm and defeat them, communities must positively and aggressively work to make things happen for themselves.

If chosen as a Great Place, Sioux City would not receive a big check from the state for millions of dollars. What it would get is a higher priority for money, resources and expertise. State doors would open more easily, bureaucracy would be streamlined, processes would be made easier. Not to be underestimated is the positive publicity that selection would generate. Such a designation would be a source of pride locally and could be a magnet for tourists, new residents and new businesses.

Dozens of citizens have worked awfully hard on this proposal over the last several months in preparation for Wednesday's presentation. The brainstorming that has taken place is one of the real positives to come out of this process, Durham said.

The people involved in this effort want to make Sioux City a better place to live and work. That should be a goal shared by us all. Collectively, we should wish them well in making Sioux City's case before the judges next week.

If they are successful, we all stand to reap the potential benefits.

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